W.E.H.C. Oral History
INTERVIEWER'S NOTES AND WORD LIST

Instructions to the Interviewer

To assist you in transcribing, please identify:

1. Passages which may be difficult to understand because of outside noise, other people in the room, problems with the tape recorder, and etc.
2. Passages which are confidentioal and therefore should not be typed.
3. Passages which need to be treated in a special way.

Please list words or phrases which might be difficult to understand, all proper names, and unfamiliar terms. If there is more than one tape, note where the second and suceeding ones begin.

Tape No. _____

This is a transcript of a taped interview with Margaret Moline as interviewer and Peggy Nelson as the interviewee. Both participants are members of the the Aladdin Homemakers Extension Club of Aladdin, Wyoming.

Interviewer: This is Margaret Moline and the date is April 4, 1988. I'm interviewing Peggy Nelson of Aladdin W.Y. Peggy will you tell me your full name and where and when you were born.

Interviewee: My name is Margaret Elizabeth Wood Nelson. I was born in Lawrence County at White Tail Gulch, four miles southwest of Lead on March 22, 1916.

I will tell you a little bit about when I moved to Aladdin and became a Wyomingite. When Al and I moved to his folks aladdin ranch on South Hay Creek in the fall of 1937 we had been married for three years. It was depression days or the dirty thirties. We put up with clouds of flying grasshoppers that you could hear coming and if they stopped for lunch not much was left on the ground or trees. Then there were the hordes of Mormon crickets walking on the ground. They were big and squashy and ate everything. The weather and insects were not good for raising gardens or crops

but we were determined to make it on our own.

My status of plain housewife changed overnight it seemed to ranchwife, choreboy and ranch hand. Al was a dependable hardworker and was away from home a lot of time. I remember looking out the windows in the early morning to see if someone was waiting to get up to see if he was free to help them. The livestock sure knew they had a greenhorn for choreboy.

As the time went by we could raise better gardens and I started learning how to can and preserve food. I had two expert teachers my mother Mabel Wood and Al's mom, Fern Nelson. Both knew how to have cellars full of food by the time winter came. I am going to talk on some of the methods used that I was familiar with.

We tried not to waste anything. A good root cellar was a must in those days. That's where you kept all your food for the wintertime. The equipment I used in canning was glass quart or pint jars that used zinc lids with glass liners and rubber rings. Later I used the metal rings and lids. I used a cold packing method. I used

my boiler and a wooden rack all made for the bottom. The jars were sealed and put into the warm water and brought to a boil for a certain length of time depending on the content. I never did use a pressure cooker. I canned, first blanching the vegetables and cooking and putting them in the jars for the cold water packing. The meat I fried a little bit on both sides and then used the brown gravy in the pan to put in the jars and cold packed. Salt was added to the meat and vegetable jars before sealing. Fruit was canned by open kettle in a light or heavy syrup and put into hot sterilized jars and sealed. Sugar was the main sweetner. Jams, jellies and butters were sealed with a thick layer of paraffin and capped. I made pickles. The quick kind was sliced or chunked and put into jars and hot vinegar and spices poured over them and sealed. These were cooked a little bit before putting in the jars. Fruit or vegetable relishes were also cooked before canning by open kettle method and canned in jars and sealed. Vegetables could be stored in crocks or wooden barrels in a brining

method such as cucumbers, sourkraut, roasting ears, green beans. A brine to float an egg was used. The crocks were set in the cellar on shelves with a cloth covered weight put on the top to keep the vegetables under the brine. A clean cloth was placed over that to keep the contents clean. The crocks were checked often and the weights, either a plate or a wooden plank, and cloths were washed and replaced regularly. Many spices were used for pickles; black and white pepper, mustard seed, garlic, ~~tum~~ turmeric, cloves, cinnamon, sugar and dill and a good vinegar. Fruit pickles could also be stored in crocks. For example, crab apples were simmered in a sugar and spice vinegar until tender and poured into a crock and covered with a cloth and a weight. Cucumbers could be pickled by first brining then freshening in several cold waters and several day of a sweet vinegar poured over, hot, each day then weighted and covered. Onions were also fixed by blanching quickly and covering with a sweet or sour vinegar to taste. Green peppers, blanched

and stuffed with shredded cabbage could be placed in crocks and a salt and vinegar brine poured over them. Grape leaves were put in the bottom and top of crocks of dill pickles and between and on top along with the dill heads. mixed spices if desired along with garlic and horseradish with a salt vinegar water brine and covered and stored in a coolish warm place. Granite or enamuled pans or kettles were the best to use when heating the vinegar in pickle making.

In drying food I dried corn, peas, apples, plums and squash. These were prepared and dried in the sun. The vegetables were blanched lightly. Apples were peled and put in salt water to keep from turning dark, plums were pitted and squash sliced thin. All were laid on sheets of cloth in the sun or attic and covered to keep clean for several days, turning or stirring occasionally. They were stored in cloth sacks and hung in a dry place. Some vegetables such as carrots, turnips, rutabagas and beets could be put in boxes or barrels with layers of clean sand and stored in the cellar. Cabbage heads were pulled, wrapped

in paper and hung in the cellar beside down or laid on shelves. Apples were wrapped individually and layered in a box or tub and a lid laid over the top and stored in the cellar. Pumpkins, melons and squash could be buried in the oat bin, or kept in a dry place away from freezing.

Butchering was usually done in cold weather. Lard was made from hot fat, cook slowly until the cracklings formed, then pressed through a lard press. A small amount of soda was added to keep it white then poured into pails and set in snow filled tubs and stirred often for a smooth white lard. Cracklings were used in cookies, cornmeal muck sliced or fried, or salted and eaten as snacks. We never used the brains or sweetbreads or tripe

Both lard and suet were used in soap making. They were rendered and strained, mixed with lye and soft water and stirred, then the mixture was poured into cloth lined boxes and left to cool before cutting into bars and left to ripen before using.

Lye was made by putting wood ashes in a barrel. When the barrel was full soft water was poured over the ashes and the lye was

drained from the barrel. Lye was used to soften water when boiling clothes. The water was skimmed before the ~~soap~~ clothes were added.

When a beef was butchered most of the meat was canned or made into jerky. We never put the beef down in corn pickling. Pork was cured with salt and brown sugar and smoked. The hams and the bacons were smoked and hung in a cloth bag and hung in a dry place. Sausage was fried and put in crocks with hot lard and allowed to cool, covered and stored in the root cellar. To use, remove the lard and reheat. The lard was used for pie crust, frying meat or vegetables or in other ways.

Head cheese was made from the hog head, tongue, heart, onions and spices, cooked, the meat removed from the bones and pressed in a cloth bag and kept for some time til set for sandwiches. The feet were pickled or cooked with kraut or cabbage. The ears and feet were cooked and used for gelatin, and the broth used to gel souse, etc. The gelatin juice gave the souse the consistency of jello.

If you had an extra amount of eggs these could be stored

in a solution of waterglass and water and kept for several months in a cellar. If one had a good supply of eggs noodles were made and dried and kept in a cloth bag. Butter was made and wrapped in several thicknesses of waxed paper, tied and put in a salt brine strong enough to float an egg. It was washed in cold water before using. Butter kept this way for several months at a time. Honey was often used as a sweetner or in baking or cooking or just put on pancakes or bread.

Spotting a bee tree was an art. People watched the bees in the spring when the trees were in bloom to see which way they went. When they could no longer see the bee they stayed in the same spot and watched again until they spotted the bee tree. In the fall in cold weather the bee tree was cut down when the bees were sluggish and the honey combs taken out. These were rendered and the honey kept in jars or pails.

In the springtime or during the summer when wild fruit was in good supply we made trips into the hills to gather wild

berries and had picnics at the same time. Some of the berries that we would pick were service berries, chokecherries, raspberries, currants, pin cherries, thornapples and sometimes a few strawberries. These berries were made into jams and jellies and the plums could be made into sauce and the grapes could become grapejuice or even grape wine. Buffalo berries could be put into a crock with sugar between the layers and covered with a cloth and as the juice formed you could take the berries out and make a buffalo berry pie by adding a little bit of flour and nutmeg. They were really good to eat. Also in the spring when you were getting hungry for some kind of new growth we looked for dandelions to make dandelion salads and greens, lambsquarter, nettles, mushrooms, mint from along the creek and watercress. Pie plant or rubarb was an early pie making ingredient.

In the fall when the barley was brought in from the field you could parch the barley and grind it to make a fair tasting coffee. This was

quite often used when real coffee fixin's was short.

I think that's about all I have to talk about for the early ways I canned and preserved things except for the milk. I guess I forgot telling you something about the milk. Milk could be canned also. I never canned any but I had a lady friend who canned extra milk to have when the cows were dry. You could let milk set overnight. In the morning scald it until a scum formed on top. Cool slightly and you had scalded milk and the cream rose to the top. It could kind of be rolled off the top. It was called Clotted Cream. Both the milk and the cream kept for a long time. Both had a very delicious different taste. When the fresh soured milk clabbered we would take a bowlful of the clabbered milk, the thick clabber, and put sugar and nutmeg on it or salt and pepper and eat it for a dessert. Or we took the thick sour cream and put it on bread and put jelly on top and had a dessert.

In making cottage cheese

you used the freshly soured milk, placed it over a low heat 120-125°, until the curds separated from the whey. It was then poured through a cloth bag and let drain until it was of the right consistency for cottage cheese. Or you could put some coloring in it, add salt and press it a little bit more so that it could be sliced and used in sandwiches. That's all I have to say.

Interviewer: Now Peggy you worked hard preparing all that food. Now what was it that you did for fun?

Interviewee: The neighbors visited frequently. There were picnics in the summertime and dances. They were the most exciting fun, I guess. They had house dances where you just moved the furniture back against the wall and several of the neighbors that could play an instrument played the music and everybody danced. We danced waltzes, square dances, schottisches, polkas, circle two steps and any number of dances like that. Then when midnight came, people had brought

sandwiches and cake and the hostess made coffee and we all had lunch and after lunch we danced until probably early morning. All the little kids that came along were piled up somewhere in a corner or on a bed asleep while their folks danced.

INTERVIEW CONTENTS

NARRATOR'S NAME_____

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